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STATISTICS INDICATE GRIZZLY SEASON CLOSER THAN 2-7 RECORD WOULD MAKE IT SEEM

MISSOULA---

Despite the fact that they wound up with a 2-7 record (0-4 in the Big Sky Conference), final 1968 statistics show that the Montana Grizzlies were even with their foes in most areas.

But even the statistics cannot relieve any bad feelings over the outcome of the season, one which, before it started, was supposed to be a "great" one.

An 18-0 loss to Northern Arizona in the cold at Flagstaff, Ariz. wound up the disappointing year. The Grizzlies held the Lumberjacks to minus one yard rushing, but four lost fumbles and four pass interceptions spelled doom for the Grizzlies, stopping the few drives the offense was able to get started and setting up all three NAU scores.

Junior tailback Mike Buzzard of Mt. Vernon, Wash., who missed the final game with an injury, ended up as the leading Grizzly ball carrier, netting 347 yards on 79 carries. He was followed by junior fullback Tony Gabriel of South River, N.J., 267 yards on 50 tries, and junior tailback-fullback Roy Robinson of Glasgow, 255 yards on 57 carries.

Ray Brum made it over the 1,000-yard mark in passing yardage, hitting on 69 of 155 passes for 1,044 yards and 9 touchdowns. The Honolulu, Hawaii junior was tops in total offense with 971 yards.

Al Luis, junior flanker from Orland, Calif., copped receiving honors with 22 catches for 371 yards and 4 TD's. Senior tight end Jim Kelly of Seattle, Wash. had 18 catches and 278 yards, while senior slotback Ron Baines of Tacoma, Wash. caught 15 for 245 yards.

Baines also led in kickoff returns, garnering 292 yards on 16 returns, with Buzzard second at 286 yards on 13 runbacks. Baines was far ahead in punt returns, taking back 15 for 190 yards.

more

STATISTICS INDICATE--2--

Senior guard Lon Howard of Centralia, Wash., after a slow start, brought his final punting average up to 41.2 yards on 61 boots.

Senior defensive back Mick O'Neill of Walla Walla, Wash. led in pass interceptions with five, returning them for a net 17 yards. Four other Grizzlies had one interception apiece.

Top scorer was place kicker Dan Worrell, Great Falls sophomore, with 46 points coming on 22 of 23 PAT boots and 8 of 13 field goals. Baines, Luis and sophomore tailback-fullback John McBurrows of Englewood, N.J. each had 24 points with four TD's apiece. Senior tailback Gartha Morgan of Seattle had three touchdowns for 18 points.

As a team, the Grizzlies trailed their opponents in total first downs, 152-151; led in net rushing yardage, 1,654-1,184; trailed in passing yardage, 1,701-1,329, and led in total offensive yardage, 2,983-2,885. The Tips were outscored on the season, 227-196.

In trying to analyze why the Grizzlies finished so poorly in 1968, one must make a comparison with the 1967 team which finished at 7-3. The 1967 team, which didn't have the personnel the 1968 team boasted, relied heavily on desire, savage hitting, and the complete dedication to winning football games.

The 1968 squad actually attained a comparable level of desire in only three games, those being against North Dakota, Montana State and Weber State. Why desire might have been lacking through most of the season is anybody's guess. But other factors were also important.

First, Montana's defensive secondary was somewhat overrated before the season began. This was especially damaging since the Grizzlies faced a fine array of passing quarterbacks and receivers in nearly all their games this season.

Secondly, Montana's offensive backfield, though deep, was not as talent-laden as spring drills made it appear, and to make things worse, the backfield was injury-riddled all fall.

Robinson, around whom Montana's ground attack and actually its entire offense had been planned, was injured early and never did reach full strength. The 9.4-second sprinter was supposed to carry the ball from 20-30 times per game, at least, and wound up the season with a total of 57 carries. Buzzard filled in well, but he, too, was hampered all season by illness and injuries.

The fullback position never did show predicted strength. Starter Rick Strauss, Polson senior, looked great in the first couple of games, but injuries struck him down, also, and he wound up the year with only 31 carries. Robinson was finally moved to fullback because of his blocking ability, but he didn't get to carry the ball much as a fullback.

Montana's coaches are on the recruiting trails again, and hope to come up with enough JC transfers to fill the gaps left by 16 departing seniors, as well as enough good freshmen to keep the UM frosh program going. Of the 22 players who filled starting spots at the season's close, 13 will return, possibly with as many as 25 other lettermen. The 1968 frosh squad should provide at least six good prospects for the 1969 season, when the Grizzlies again face a nine-game schedule.